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UNCLAS NIAMEY 001062

C O R R E C T E D COPY(ADDRESSEE ADDED)

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR G/IWI SPECIAL COORDINATOR ANDREA BOTTFNER OR G/IWI  
DEPUTY DIRECTOR SANDRA PEDROARIAS FROM AMBASSADOR  
BERNADETTE M. ALLEN

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: NIGER: WOMAN OF COURAGE NOMINEE HADIJATOU MANI

REF: STATE 99729

¶1. Embassy Niamey enthusiastically nominates Ms. Hadijatou Mani, a 24-year old woman born into caste-based servitude (an inherited status from her mother), who challenged the vestiges of a long-standing affront to humanity, the institution of slavery. On October 27, 2008, she won an historic, precedent-setting decision in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Court of Justice that condemned her enslavement, a decision that could set off a chain of events that help to eradicate slavery once and for all in West Africa. The Court held that the Government of Niger had not protected her rights by implementing its anti-slavery laws, and assessed it a fine of 10 million CFA (approximately 19,800).

¶2. While Ms. Mani is not a political activist or well-known leader, her persistence and willingness to serve as a test case in the ECOWAS Court of Justice to condemn the inhumane practice demonstrates courage beyond measure. It has been said that revolutions often arise from the resolute, not necessarily the reactionary, and Ms. Mani's role mirrors that of mild-mannered civil rights icon Mrs. Rosas Parks, who challenged in 1955 an unjust system of inequality. The instant case not only is a victory for those who have sought to eradicate the vestiges of slavery in Africa, but bodes well for the future of African regional institutions, which remain a pillar of USG strategy for engaging the continent.

¶3. Ms. Mani's servitude began at the age of 12, when she was sold for the equivalent of US\$500 to her master as a domestic, used as a sex slave and made to bear her master's children. She suffered beatings and reported that when she'd run away to her family she would be returned to the master. She said she heard in 2003 that Niger had banned slavery, but her master did not provide her a "liberation certificate" until 2005. She had no real independence because according to traditional law, she remained legally married to the master. After she later married the man of her choice, she faced a judicial ordeal when she was imprisoned for six months on charges of bigamy.

¶4. The local nongovernmental organization (NGO), Timidria, worked with Ms. Mani to initiate local legal proceedings on her behalf. NGO Anti-Slavery International helped Ms. Mani bring the case to the ECOWAS Court. She endured tremendous social pressures during the local and ECOWAS court proceedings, i.e., possible interventions (directly or through family members) to "convince" her to abandon the lawsuit. With confidence, assertiveness and steadfastness she played a pivotal role in raising awareness on this important issue.

¶5. Ms. Mani was notified of this nomination and expressed gratitude for the Embassy's interest in nominating her for the award. She was born in 1984 in Niger and is a Nigerien citizen. Her contact information is through the NGO Timidria, with email address: Timidria@intnet.ne and telephone number: (227) 20-72-41-29. Her mailing address is: c/o Timidria, B.P. 430 Niamey, Republic of Niger.

ALLEN